

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 2223

THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT ACTION CINCPAC CINCPACAF AMEMB SAIGON
USDAO SAIGON MSCOV SAIGON AMEMB PHNOM PENH USDAO PHNOM PENH
CHMEDTC PHNOM PENH COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK FROM USSAG NKP APRT THAI
DATED 041100Z FEB 75, REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO.

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PORG, CB

SUBJ: LESSONS LEARNED, MEKONG CONVOY

REF: COMUSSAG 041100Z FEB 75

QUOTE

CINCPAC FOR J3/J4. USDAO SGN PASS TO JGS, RVNAF ATTN:

BG THO, PACAF FOR IN

SUBJ: LESSONS LEARNED, MEKONG CONVOY (U)

1. (C) THERE HAVE BEEN THREE NORTHBOUND/SOUTHBOUND
CONVOYS SINCE THE INITIATION OF THE KC DRY SEASON
OFFENSIVE. THE LESSONS LEARNED FROM THESE CONVOY OPERATIONS
ARE CLEAR CUT AND MUST BE INCORPORATED INTO FUTURE
ENDEAVORS.

2. (C) CURRENT SITUATION:

A. THE MEKONG SPECIAL ZONE PLAN HAD ALMOST BEEN
FULLY IMPLEMENTED IN DECEMBER 1974. THE PLAN CALLED FOR
BFM OUTPOSTS AT STRATEGIC CHOKE POINTS ALONG THE RIVER;
AN INTEGRATED ARTILLERY FIRE SUPPORT PLAN THAT FURNISHED
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100 PER CENT COVERAGE; AND KAF SUPPORT AS REQUIRED. AS
IMPLEMENTED THE PLAN INSURED THE SUCCESS OF CONVOYS.

HOWEVER, THE SITUATION CHANGED DRAMATICALLY WITH THE INITIATION OF THE KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. THE ENEMY OVER-RAN ALMOST ALL OF THE BFM OUTPOSTS SOUTH OF NEAK LUONG. AS A RESULT, THE ARTILLERY FIRE SUPPORT PLAN WAS TOTALLY DISRUPTED AND THE ENEMY GAINED CONTROL OF THE KEY SOUTHERN CHOKE POINTS. NORTH OF NEAK LUONG, FANK RETAINED CONTROL OF DEI DOH AND REESTABLISHED A BN POSITION AT PREK YUON. ARTILLERY COVERAGE FOR MOST OF THE NORTHERN SECTOR OF THE LOWER MEKONG WAS MAINTAINED. HOWEVER, DURING THE ENEMY OFFENSIVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE BFM WAS MARGINAL. IN SEVERAL CASES OUTPOSTS WERE ABANDONED WITHOUT MUCH OF A FIGHT AND IN AT LEAST ONE INSTANCE THE LEADERS ABANDONED A MAJOR OUTPOST PRIOR TO AN ENEMY ATTACK. BECAUSE OF THE LOSS OF THE OUTPOSTS, FANK HAS HAD TO INSERT THE EQUIVALENT OF ONE AND ONE-HALF BRIGADES IN THE LOWER MEKONG. THIS HAS PROVIDED BETTER PROTECTION BUT HAS NOT ENABLED THEM TO REESTABLISH ALL THE KEY OUTPOSTS OR TO EXPAND ARTILLERY COVERAGE. CURRENTLY THE ENEMY CONTROLS KEY CHOKE POINTS NEAR PEAM REANG ISLAND AND MOST OF THE RIVER BANKS IN THE VICINITY OF DEI DOH AND JUST SOUTH OF NEAK LUONG.

B. THE MAJORITY OF THE ENEMY ATTACKS AGAINST CONVOYS HAVE OCCURED BETWEEN PARALLELS 21 AND 30 (THE PEAM REANG/ PEAN CHOR AREA) AND BETWEEN PARALLELS 56 AND 69 (THE DEI DOH/PREK YUON AREA). IN THE 20 PLUS ABFS BETWEEN PARALLELS 21 AND 30 THE ENEMY HAS USED RECOILLESS RIFLES, RPG'S AND MORTARS WITH ACCURACY, WITH THE PREDOMINANCE OF FIRE BEING BY RECOILLESS RIFLES. IN THE 50 PLUS ABFS IN THE DEI DOH AREA THEY HAVE USED RECOILLESS RIFLES AND RPG'S WITH THE PREDOMINANCE OF FIRE BEING RPG'S. ENEMY FIRE HAS BEEN PROLONGED AND INTENSIVE, SEVERAL ABFS HAVE LASTED IN EXCESS OF 30 MINUTES. THE KC HAVE FIRED MORE RECOILLESS RIFLES AND RPG ROUNDS AGAINST ONE CONVOY LATELY THAN THEY FIRED DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THOSE THAT HAVE NOT VIEWED THE CURRENT ABFS TO VISUALIZE THE INTENSITY OF THE FIRE.

C. ENEMY ATTACKS WERE PROBABLY MORE EFFECTIVE AT NIGHT THAN DURING THE DAY BECAUSE KAF'S CAPABILITIES AT NIGHT ARE MUCH REDUCED. BY USING FLARES, THE ENEMY HAS BEEN ABLE TO SILHOUETTE THE SHIPS AND PROVIDE ACCURATE FIRE. NEW ENEMY
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TACTICS ARE THE USE OF BARRACADES AND MINES. MNK HAS BEEN ABLE TO CUT THE BARRACADES EASILY ENOUGH AND THEY HAVE NOT PROVEN EFFECTIVE. HOWEVER, THE ENEMY'S FIRST USE OF MINES WAS MOST SUCCESSFUL; MAINLY, IT IS BELIEVED, BECAUSE MNK WAS NOT ACTIVELY SWEEPING FOR THEM. IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT THE MINES ARE THE FLOATING TYPE WHICH SHOULD BE ABLE TO BE EASILY DETECTED. HOWEVER, THE ENEMY MIGHT HAVE A SUBMERSIVE MINE CAPABILITY THAT COULD REQUIRE A MUCH MORE SOPHISTICATED RESPONSE BY MNK (THEY PROBABLY DO NOT HAVE ADEQUOATE EQUIPMENT FOR THE JOB.

D. LOSSES ON THE LOWER MEKONG HAVE NOT BEEN GREAT ON NORTHBOUND VOYAGES NOR HAD THEY BEEN PARTICULARLY ACUTE SOUTHBOUND UNTIL PT-113, WHEN THREE TUGS AND ONE POL TANKER WERE SUNK. THE FOLLOWING TABLE INDICATES THE TRACK RECORD FOR THE 1975 CONVOYS.

MEKONG CONVOYS (1975)

(ARRIVED/SAILED)

	BARGES				SHIPS		
AMMO	RICE	TUGS	SHIELDS		RICE	POL	
NORTHBOUND	6/6	2/2	16/16	35/40		2/3	4/6
SOUTHBOUND	6/6	-	9/12	23/30		0/1	1/2
LOSSES	0	0	3	10	2	3	

3. (C) MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED:

A. FIREPOWER: THE GREATEST DETERRENT TO ENEMY EFFECTIVENESS IS FANK FIRE POWER. TO DATE, KAF WHEN UTILIZED HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL. BOMBS ON TARGET HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUPPRESS THE ENEMY. MNK HAS BEEN GUTSY, BUT DUE TO THE LACK OF FIRE POWER (EXCEPT MONITORS) MNK HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPRESS FIRE. THE USE OF ARTILLERY, PARTICULARLY THAT STATIONED AT NEAK LUONG, HAS BEEN POOR. TO BE SUCCESSFUL, CONVOYS MUST BE OPERATED WHEN KAF HAS MAXIMUM AVAILABILITY SUPPORTED BY GREATEST POSSIBLE ARTILLERY SUPPORT. WITHOUT THESE TWO KEY ELEMENTS, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT ENEMY FIRE CAN BE SUPPRESSED. UNTIL THE ENEMY IS ATTRITED (KILLED), THE SITUATION WILL NOT GET BETTER.

B. NIGHT VERSUS DAY OPERATIONS: NIGHT OPERATIONS HAVE NOT BEEN TOO SUCCESSFUL AND IN THE FUTURE THEY WILL BE EVEN LESS SO. THE ENEMY IS NOW USING MINES WHICH MIGHT BE VISUALLY DETECTED IN DAYTIME. KAF AT NIGHT IS NOT EFFECTIVE. THEREFORE, CONVOYS SHOULD BE RUN IN DAYTIME WHEN ENEMY FIRES CAN BE SUPPRESSED AND MINES HOPEFULLY
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DETECTED.

C. USE OF SMOKE: ALL OF THE ENEMY WEAPONS, INCLUDING COMMAND DETONATED MINES, ARE LINE OF SIGHT. MNK HAS BEEN PROVIDED SMOKE AND HAS TESTED IT. IT IS HOPED THAT THE USE OF SMOKE ON THE NEXT CONVOY WILL BE USEFUL IN REDUCING ENEMY VISIBILITY.

D. BARGES VERSUS SHIPS: TO DATE NONE OF THE LOW SILHOUETTE BARGES HAVE BEEN LOST TO ENEMY FIRE. ON THE OTHER HAND, FIVE RICE AND POL VESSELS HAVE BEEN LOST. THIS IS A COMBINATION OF TWO FACTORS, FIRST THE BARGES ARE PROTECTED BY SHIELD BARGES WHICH HAVE PROVEN TO BE OF INESTIMABLE VALUE. SECOND, THE LOW PROFILE MAKES THEM LESS

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VULNERABLE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE RICE BARGES HAD NO SHIELDS ATTACHED AND MADE THE TRANSIT. IN THE FUTURE, AN ALL-BARGE-CONCEPT WILL BE IMPLEMENTED. THE KEY TO THIS CONCEPT IS THE AVAILABILITY OF SHIELD BARGES.

E. SHIELD BARGES: SHIELD BARGES HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE. OF THE SEVEN BARGES IN TP-111 IT WAS FOUND THAT EACH SUSTAINED AN AVERAGE OF 20 HITS WITH RECOILLESS RIFLES OF RPG'S. SHIELD BARGES ARE EXPENSIVE, NOW COSTING ABOUT \$40,000 EACH. ALREADY 10 HAVE BEEN LOST AND IT IS ESTIMATED THAT ONLY THREE OR FOUR WILL BE RECOVERED. THE ALL BARGE CONCEPT REQUIRES 36 SHIELD BARGES. FOURTEEN ARE NOW AVAILABLE, 10 ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION AND 12 MORE HAVE BEEN ORDERED. CONSIDERING CURRENT LOSSES THIS WILL NOT BE ENOUGH TO SUPPORT AN ALL BARGE CONCEPT.

F. ASSET AVAILABILITY: THE PERFORMANCE OF CIVILIAN CREWS HAS BEEN HEROIC. WHILE MANY CREWS HAVE FAILED TO GO, SOME CREW MEMBERS ARE MAKING THE JOURNEY FOR THE THIRD TIME. PT-113 RESULTED IN FOUR CREW MEMBERS MISSING AND SEVERAL DEAD AND MANY WOUNDED. CREWS ARE PROBABLY UNDERPAID CONSIDERING THE RISKS THEY ARE TAKING. THEY NEED SOME TYPE OF INCENTIVE PAY. BELIEVE CONTRACTS MIGHT HAVE TO BE RE-NEGOTIATED TO PROVIDE CREW MEMBERS MORE MONEY. THE NUMBER ONE PROBLEM IS THE AVAILABILITY OF BARGE/SHIP ASSETS. SEAPAC DESERVES A GREAT CREDIT FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE TO DATE. RIGHT NOW THEY ARE THE ONLY CONTRACTOR STILL WILLING TO MAKE THE TRIP. FOR ALL INTENTS THE RICE/POL SHIPPERS HAVE DEFINITELY RENEGED.

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WE NEED A SINGLE CONTRACTOR TO OPERATE THE ALL BARGE CONCEPT.

G. MINE THREAT: THE ONLY NEW WEAPON TO DATE HAS BEEN MINES. BY GOING TO DAYLIGHT OPERATIONS AND PROVIDING MNK SWEEPS AGGRESSIVELY FLOATING MINES SHOULD BE HANDLED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE ENEMY IS USING SUBMERSIBLE COMMAND DETONATED MINES AND UNLESS MORE SOPHISTICATED MINE DETECTING EQUIPMENT IS MADE AVAILABLE TO MNK, THIS COULD SUCCESSFULLY CLOSE THE MEKONG. MORE WILL BE KNOWN ON THE MINE THREAT AFTER TP-115. UNLESS MNK PROVIDES MAXIMUM PROTECTION EVEN THE CURRENT THREAT IS FORMIDABLE.

H. ATTRITION: ASSETS ARE BEING ATTRITED WITH EVERY CONVOY. MNK IS LOSING VESSELS AND THEY ARE GETTING TIRED. IT IS HARD TO QUANTIFY FATIGUE. WE LOSE ADDITIONAL SHIELD BARGES AND COMMERCIAL ASSETS ARE ALSO BEING LOST WITH EACH CONVOY. CONTINUED ATTRITION COULD HAVE SERIOUS RESULTS. WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO SCHEDULE CONVOYS EVERY FOUR DAYS BUT WE MUST GET BACK TO FOUR A MONTH SCHEDULE. PLANS NOW CALL FOR FOUR CONVOYS PER MONTH CONSISTING OF 8 BARGES; 3 AMMO, 3 RICE AND 2 POL. THIS WILL PROVIDE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO PHNOM PENH.

4. (C) TP-115 IS A WATER SHED. FIRST SEAPAC MUST SAIL. WE THINK THEY WILL. HAVING INITIATED THE CONVOY, IT MUST GET THROUGH. THIS REQUIRES MAXIMUM FIRE SUPPORT BY ARTILLERY AND KAF AND MAXIMUM COUNTER-MINE MEASURES BY MNK. FAILURE OF TP-115 COULD PERMANENTLY END CIVILIAN SUPPORT OF FUTURE OPERATIONS.

5. (C) IN SUMMARY, CONVOYS SHOULD BE OPERATED IN DAYLIGHT WITH MAXIMUM FIRE SUPPORT AND AGGRESSIVE MINE SWEEPING. THE ALL BARGE CONCEPT MUST BE IMPLEMENTED. SUCCESS OF THE CONVOY REQUIRES MAXIMUM KAF PARTICIPATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE IDENTIFIED AREAS OF MOST INTENSIVE ENEMY FIRE. IT ALSO REQUIRES VASTLY IMPROVED ARTILLERY SUPPORT. THE KEY, OF COURSE, IS TO PUT MORE FANK TROOPS ON THE GROUND AT THE CHOKE POINTS. MNK MUST PERFECT THEIR MINE SWEEPING CAPABILITIES. COMMERCIAL VESSELS SHOULD BE PROVIDED AMPLE COMPENSATION TO MAKE IT WORTH THEIR WHILE TO MAKE THIS INTENSIVE COMBAT RUN. IT WILL TAKE TOTAL DETERMINATION TO KEEP THE MEKONG OPEN.
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